

[*applause*—Government should welcome the great work that comes out of our Christian houses and Jewish temples and Muslim institutions. We must not fear faith in our society. We must welcome faith and welcome the armies of compassion who are healing hearts and helping change America one soul at a time.

A compassionate society must provide—promote opportunity for all, and that includes the independence and dignity that come from ownership. This administration will constantly promote an ownership society in America. We want more people owning their home. We've got homeownership—a minority homeownership gap in America. I've submitted a plan to Congress to close that gap.

We want more people owning their own health care plans and managing their own health care plans. We want people to manage and own their own retirement accounts. We want more people owning their own small business. We understand that when a person owns something, he or she has a vital stake in the future of America.

In a compassionate society, people respect one another, respect their points of view, and they take responsibility for the decisions they make. The culture of America is changing from one that has said, "If it feels good, do it," and "If you've got a problem, blame somebody else," to a new culture in which each of us understands we are responsible for the decisions we make in life. If you are fortunate enough to be a mom or a dad, you're responsible for loving your child with all your heart. If you are concerned about the quality of the education in the community in which you live, you're responsible for doing something about it. If you're a CEO in corporate America, you're responsible for telling the truth to your shareholders and your employees.

And in this new responsibility society, each of us is responsible for loving our neighbor just like we'd like to be loved ourselves. We can see the culture of service and responsibility growing around us. I started what's called the USA Freedom Corps. If you're interested, you can go right on the computer and look it up. It's a chance to encourage people to extend a compassionate hand to

a neighbor in need, and the response has been strong. America is a giving country. The heart and soul of the American people is really the strength of our country.

Policemen and firefighters and people who wear our Nation's uniform are reminding us what it means to sacrifice for something greater than yourself. Once again, the children of America believe in heroes because they see them every day.

In these challenging times, the world has seen the resolve and the courage of America. And I have been privileged to see the compassion and the character of the American people. All the tests of the last 2½ years have come to the right Nation. We're a strong country, and we use that strength to defend the peace. We're an optimistic country, confident in ourselves and in ideals bigger than ourselves. Abroad, we seek to lift whole nations by spreading freedom. At home, we seek to lift up lives by spreading opportunity to every corner of America. This is the work that history has set before us. We welcome it, and we know that for our country, the best days lie ahead.

God bless. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12 noon at the Sheraton Birmingham Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Richard Shelby of Alabama and his wife, Annette; Mercer Reynolds, national finance chairman, and Mike Thompson, Alabama State finance chairman, Bush-Cheney '04, Inc.; Marty Connors, chairman, Alabama Republican Party; W. Edgar Welden, Sr., Alabama national committeeman, and Bettye Fine Collins, Alabama national committeewoman, Republican National Committee; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Statement on Senate Passage of the "Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense and for the Reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan, 2004"

November 3, 2003

I commend Congress for providing vital funds to support our mission and our troops deployed in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. These resources, coupled with the growing assistance of international donors,

will provide essential support to make Iraq more secure and to help the Iraqi people transition to self-government. The funds will also enable us to continue our efforts to help Afghanistan become a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous nation that contributes to regional stability.

Our country is being tested. Those who seek to kill coalition forces and innocent Iraqis want America and its coalition partners to run so the terrorists can reclaim control. The strong bipartisan show of support for this bill underscores that America and the world are united to prevail in the central front in the war on terror by helping build a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous Iraq.

I thank Chairmen Stevens and Young for their efforts and look forward to signing this bill.

Remarks on the California Wildfires and an Exchange With Reporters in Harbison Canyon, California

November 4, 2003

The President. A lot of people in this neighborhood lost all their possessions, but the spirit is strong. America has got some wonderful citizenry who just refuse to be defeated. I met some families here that are obviously crushed by the material loss, and they look forward to rebuilding—rebuilding their lives. And the role of government, the Federal Government and the State Government and the local government, is helping as best as we can.

You know, the worst of nature can bring out the best in our fellow human beings. And to a person, they were thankful for the fact that neighbors do care about neighbors and people are helping people here. It's just tough for a lot of folks who live in this part of the world.

I want to thank the supervisor and firefighters for welcoming us here.

Let me answer a few questions, and we'll keep going.

Q. What do you say to these people—

The President. Hold it one second, please. We've got an order—

Q. I'm sorry.

Iraq/California Wildfires

Q. Thanks, Mr. President. I've got a couple questions. One, what's your evaluation, your assessment of this scene you've seen here? And two, to more and more Americans, the situation in Iraq is looking like a hot war. Are we back to major combat operations?

The President. No, we're back to finding these terrorists and bringing them to justice. And we will continue to find the terrorists and bring them to justice. These people want to—"these people" being the terrorists and those who would kill innocent life—want us to retreat. They want us to leave, because they know that a free and peaceful Iraq in their midst will damage their cause. And we will stay the course. We will do our job.

First question?

Q. What's your—what do you see when you look at this scene here?

The President. I see more tragedy and heartache. I see the loss of a lot of material possessions. However, I see a strong spirit which exists here. I see people who are resolved to rebuild their lives. Amidst their tears, they do see hope, and that is a great tribute to the people in this part of California. This State has been devastated: Over 3,300 homes have been destroyed; 4,000-some-odd structures have been destroyed; hundreds of thousands of acres have been burned. And yet the spirit is strong. People are resolved to move on with their life, and we want to help them. That's why I'm here with Federal agencies, with the Governor and Governor-elect, as well as local officials, all of whom are determined to provide the resources necessary to help.

Iraq

Q. Mr. President, again on Iraq, sir. Are you moving to a process of Iraqification, trying to use Iraqi—

The President. What was the word?

Q. Iraqification—to accelerate the transition to the Iraqi people, instead of bringing in more international aid. Are you having trouble getting a broader—

The President. Randy, [Randall Mikkelsen, Reuters] we'll do both. We'll bring in aid from those countries that want to help. We had a very successful donors'